



## Gilman Alumni Interview Transcript – *Cynthia Gomez*

My name is Cynthia Gomez and I studied in Brazil, in a city called Salvador, in the state of Bahia. I went with UC Berkeley, it was a program that was actually with the entire UC system, which is the University of California. I was able to go with students from all over the state of California.

I always knew that I wanted to study abroad, and I think when I was in community college I kind of went to some kind of fair and they had pamphlets and of course to me it did not seem possible until I transferred. I know now that obviously community college students do go study abroad and the Gilman actually does fund community college students. So, I wish I had known that information prior but nonetheless, when I was doing my undergrad at Berkeley, I ended up deciding that you know what I am going to stay an extra semester, and spend an entire semester abroad.

The reason that I choose to go to Brazil is that when I was looking for study abroad programs I thought I need to go somewhere where I would not typically find myself years from now. I don't think you would think I am going to live in Brazil for four months. I kind of went on to the page that had all of the study abroad partnerships and I looked, you know they had the flags and I clicked on each one, and I said Brazil, I want to learn a new language, I know Spanish, and I want to be in Latin America so let's go to Brazil. That is how I picked it, I felt like I wanted to be challenged, I wanted an experience that was different and I kind of saw also the academic advantage in terms of it fit into my major, I was studying development studies and my area of concentration was Latin America. So, I thought it would be great to actually go to the country that I was reading about.

I had a home-stay mom and a dad, and it was so amazing because you really felt like you had a family. I had a key to the house, and for breakfast, lunch and dinner I had home-cooked meals, I was really spoiled. I had my own room, it was actually the first time I had ever had my own room. So that was pretty amazing, but learning the language through doing the home-stay was just amazing because I got to have conversations with my mom, and had it not been for the home-stay I don't think I would have been able to leave Brazil after three-and-a-half, four months, being able to speak to people on the street and feel comfortable.

I did a language and culture program so it was really important for us to learn the language. So, we had class five days a week, and it was just with a program of students and it was at this cultural center. So, we had language class in the morning, and then we had a culture class. That involved a lot of cultural and academic excursions. So, we got to go to different cities, historical cities, we did this boat ride

through these absolutely beautiful islands, it was just amazing it really looked like something out of a magazine. We got to participate in festivities that the locals do, they have these parades. It was really great to get to see that and have people that coordinated the program, and had contacts. So, day-to-day we were in class, but you would come home and some people did Capueras, some people did Jujitsu, I tried doing dance lessons. There were so much to do outside of the program and we were not consumed by a heavy workload because the point was for you to acquire the language and learn about the culture. The way you do that is not by reading your books at home it is by going out and interacting, and taking part in extra-curriculars and you know talking with locals. We really got to do that.

For my follow on project, it was really important for me to work with transfer students, as a transfer student myself I knew that transfer students may feel like they have obstacles that other students don't. I did a couple presentations with Styles Hall, which is a non-profit that helps underrepresented students apply and get into UC Berkeley. So I went and I spoke to them, it was very casual, but I think to see someone who transferred and study abroad really made them realize that they could do it.

My advice for students who are even remotely interested in studying abroad is to do it. There really is no other time like this. So, I think the biggest challenge is actually finishing through. If you start something make sure you finish it. If you are a transfer student, you can study abroad, you can make it happen. Don't be afraid of looking into programs. The first step is looking into it and following through on everything.